



The Bethlehem Christmas Cake

Baked with Golden orange, warm balsamic Frankincense, and smoky Myrrh flavors

1 cup full fat natural plain yogurt
1/2 Tablespoon Balsamic vinegar
1/2 Tablespoon vanilla
2-1/2 cups all purpose flour
1-1/2 teaspoons baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
3/4 cup unsalted butter
1-1/3 cups granulated sugar
3 teaspoons grated orange peel
1 cup sugar coated chopped dates
1 cup chopped salted smoked almonds

Orange syrup:

1/2 cup granulated sugar
1/4 teaspoon grated orange peel
1/4 cup orange juice
3 to 4 Tablespoon fine ground gingersnap cookies

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Line a 9x13 pan with foil; lightly grease bottom; place a piece of parchment paper on bottom; lightly grease; set aside.

In a small bowl, stir yogurt with balsamic vinegar and vanilla; set aside.

In a separate medium sized bowl, combine flour, baking soda, and salt; set aside...

In a mixing bowl, cream butter with sugar; add the yogurt mixture and grated orange peel. Slowly, add the dry ingredients; stir in the dates and almonds.

Spread into prepared baking pan; bake in preheated 350 oven for 30 minutes and golden brown or tests done. Remove from oven; let rest 10 minutes. With a toothpick, poke holes over the top of cake.

Prepare the orange syrup: In a medium sized saucepan, stir sugar, grated orange peel, and orange juice together; cook; bring to a boil, stir until sugar is melted. Set aside.

Lightly brush the cake top with about half of orange syrup; set remaining syrup aside. Sprinkle the top of cake with crushed gingersnap cookies; press down lightly.

Use the foil to remove cake from pan and turn cake upside down onto large serving plate. Remove, discard parchment and foil. Remove any extra crumbs from serving plate. Brush the top and sides of cake with remaining warm syrup. Let cool. Place cake in refrigerator to set glaze.

If decorating cake: Use confectioners' sugar with a star template to create a Bethlehem Star on the top of cake.

Serve cake in 1- or 2-inch slices. Yield: one 13x9-inch cake

About the Recipe: The original recipe was a West Jerusalem Palestinian Christian family favorite that was baked for decades.

It inspired me to recreate this cake, highlighting the journey of the 3 Kings and adding flavors of golden oranges, sweet balsamic tang, and smoky almonds to the recipe. The finished cake has the added flavor of snappy ginger cookies.

A Word about the Herbs: They are best known through the story of the Three Wise Men (Magi) delivering gold, frankincense, and myrrh for the baby Jesus; myrrh was also used to anoint Jesus' body after the crucifixion. These herbs, valued like gold, were mentioned repeatedly in the Old Testament, in instructions to Moses about making incense and anointing oil, and in the Song of Solomon.

St. Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia (now in Turkey) was a 4th-century miracle-worker, known also for the healing myrrh that flowed from his sacred relics <http://www.itmonline.org/arts/myrrh.htm>